

Oral history interview with H.R. Haldeman,  
conducted by Raymond H. Gesselbracht and Fred J. Graboske  
at the Pickett Street Annex of the National Archives  
on August 13, 1987

FJG: OK, Mr. Haldeman, you said that the one item you did want to talk about was the fire bombing of [the] Brookings [Institution]. How did you learn of this plan?

HRH: I'm glad to have a--I wasn't all that anxious to talk about it, it's just that that's something that like so many things in the Nixon quote, "history," closed quote, has become quote, "fact," closed quote, and somewhere the record's got to be set straight someday. Maybe this will be one opportunity to do that.

Let me put a disclaimer in on a general basis so I do it once before--because it applies to this as well as a lot of other answers, and then I'm not going to refer to it anymore. But it applies to the whole conversation this morning. And that is that in thinking about answering these questions--and having spent a couple days working through some archival material the last two days in another direction--it occurs to me, that in talking this morning you [have] got to, and the user of this material in the future has got to, recognize that this is now 1987, that I left the White House fourteen years ago, and that events in the White House that took place prior to my departure, which I presume is what we're going to be talking about primarily, took place eighteen, up to eighteen years ago, [and] that you the archivists have the advantage of having--at least some of you--of having

mine--emphasis you might say on bad points. In my case, and I would suspect it's true of Henry and John also, the reason those are there, in my case--because that's not my nature to talk about the bad things, and I never did when I was in the White House, and I didn't intend to when I got out--was the demand literally by the publisher and my co-author that you have to cover those too in order to have any credibility, that you cannot continue to maintain the myth that this guy is absolutely perfect. You've got to face the fact, because the world knows that he is not. In this case because the shade already has been lifted--they've heard him.

I went through a long session with Billy Graham after the tapes were released. Billy was out in Los Angeles and called and wanted to get together, and I went over to the hotel and spent a whole afternoon. He was absolutely crushed. And he said, "Bob, I can't believe what I've read in the tapes, because," he said, "in all the hours I spent with Richard Nixon, and there were many, many hours, he never said 'damn,' let alone all those things--the kinds of things I hear him saying on the tapes." And he said, "I can't believe it, and I'm hoping that you will tell me that there's something wrong with the tapes, which I can't believe is the case. But how can you explain this?" I told him--Richard Nixon had enormous respect for Billy Graham, and enormous affection for him. And he recognized him as a man of the church, and there wasn't any way he was going to say, "damn" or "shit" or "fuck" in front of Richard Nixon--I mean in front of Billy Graham. On the other hand, when he was letting off steam,

dealing with us, talking about things, he used locker room language. And I said to Billy Granam, "I have to confirm to you that that was not untypical, it wasn't just Watergate. If you hear the tapes of the early years, you'll hear the same stuff in the early years. It might have been worse under the pressure of Watergate at times, but it was always there. And it was there before he became President, and I'm sure it's there now." And I'm sure it is, because that's the way he talks. And I said, "I hate to tell you this, Billy, but I think that you would find, if any of your other friends, other than men of the cloth--and probably a lot of the men of the cloth too--if they had been taped in all of their conversations, at all times in all places, that they'd be using some of that language too. And maybe a lot more than you'd be able to believe of them, either." That helped him. I mean, you know, he said, "I suppose that's true." I said, "Everybody--we all--I use bad language when I talk to people who're using bad language, but I don't use it when I'm talking to people who don't. I never have said any word like that in front of my kids or my wife. But, you know, [with] my business associates and personal friends, and things like that, I do. I'm not proud of that fact, and I'm not saying it to you to brag. I'm saying it to you because it might help you to understand that you, given the eminence that you have as a man of the cloth, are going to be treated differently by people than other people." And he sort of understood that.

That got me way off the track. Where was I?

FJG: I think you were going to talk about some of Nixon's positive